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Galleries experiment with alternative models — including sharing spaces

French dealer Patrick Seguin on his Carte Blanche programme

By Georgina Adam



'Mask' paintings by Will Boone from David Kordansky Gallery © Jeff McLane

Much has been written over the past few years about the demise of mid-tier galleries. The situation may not be as dramatic as sometimes thought — gallery openings over the past decade have actually outnumbered closures. But at the same time the number of openings has declined steadily, according to the 2018 Art Basel UBS report. And just a week ago, the respected Arratia Beer gallery in Berlin announced it was shuttering — the latest casualty in a market that favours the big, rich players but is proving tougher for the smaller fry.

As a result, gallerists are increasingly experimenting with alternative models, such as sharing spaces. But none of this is new to the respected French dealer Patrick Seguin, who has been ahead of the curve by organising co-operative shows since 2002. A specialist in 20th-century designers, such as Jean Prouvé, Charlotte Perriand, Le Corbusier and Jean Royère, Seguin has had a Paris gallery (designed by Jean Nouvel) for almost 30 years, and a London space since 2015.

Since he opened in Paris, more than 10 international galleries have held exhibitions in his space, from Jablonka in 2002 to Karma in 2016, and including the heavyweights Gagosian, Massimo de Carlo, Paula Cooper and kurimanzutto.

What initially made Seguin take this initiative, which he dubs “Carte Blanche”?

“Since I opened, we’ve had a history of exhibiting contemporary art in addition to design,” he says. “The gallery specialises in mid-century French design, but as a collector of contemporary art, my approach is to always be looking to the future, with avant-garde galleries and artists.”

He cites as an example a show he held back in 1995 called *Pièces-Meublés*, which paired furniture by Jean Prouvé and Charlotte Perriand with art by Rudolf Stingel, Franz West, Albert Oehlen, John Armleder, Louise Lawler and others.

“The aim was to establish a dialogue between these two aesthetic realms,” he continues, saying that the synergy between mid-20th-century design and contemporary art is “undeniable”. “This way, working with relevant and significant galleries, I’m constantly strengthening my own knowledge about the future of contemporary art.”

Seguin says his concept is “pretty simple”; he chooses the gallery and gives them a month in his space. There have been solo shows — Sadie Coles with Jim Lambie in 2010, or Gagosian with Richard Prince in 2008 — and group shows. Earlier this year, Ivor Braka showed Francis Bacon, Frank Auerbach and Lucian Freud at Seguin’s London gallery as part of the programme.

This autumn Seguin is upping the ante, for the first time holding two exhibitions, one in Paris and one in London, as well as inviting a Los Angeles gallery for the first time. In Paris during Fiac, the David Kordansky Gallery will curate a show of Will Boone, a Texas-based artist whose paintings and installations draw on punk rock, horror films and cattle ranching. His exhibition will show new “Mask” paintings and sculptures based on the Chevrolet logo. It is his first solo show in Paris.

In London during Frieze, Campoli Presti is showing the Americans Cheyney Thompson and Liz Deschenes — both of whom Seguin collects — alongside architectural elements by Jean Prouvé. The show will explore changes in volume caused by the interplay of light and shadow with three mobile structures, in harmony with the aluminium Prouvé uses in his demountable pieces.

Seguin sees the co-operative model as a win-win situation: “It was always obvious to me that contemporary art and mid-20th-century design should be set in a dialogue in exhibitions, in the homes of private collectors, because of their symbiotic relationship. Given my focus on furniture, I have no competition with art galleries but instead have been able to develop very close relationships with many of them, as well as with many contemporary artists,” he explains.

There may be a lot of sense in galleries sharing spaces, as in Seguin’s *Carte Blanche*. Another promising scheme is the Condo initiative — a programme of exhibitions in different cities in which the host galleries share their spaces with the visiting galleries — which is now in its third year. According to cultural adviser Sebastien Montabonel, “in marketing speak, collaborative models are the equivalent of brand affiliations, such as two galleries sharing an exhibition space in Condo, or in the case of artists, the reciprocal halo effect of joint exhibitions such as the Pace show of Rothko/Sugimoto. The benefits become a multiple of the individual factors.”

What is certain is that galleries are increasingly having to find new solutions to the problems facing them, whether they be shared spaces or even closing the gallery altogether and using pop-ups or working as an adviser. Condo and Carte Blanche are one solution: it will be interesting to see what other initiatives emerge.

‘Carte Blanche to Campoli Presti’ Galerie Patrick Seguin, London, October 2-November 10; ‘Carte Blanche to David Kordansky’, Galerie Patrick Seguin, Paris October 18-November 24, patrickseguin.com